

Aristotelian Rhetoric in Contemporary Media Discourse: A Linguistic Analysis of Ethos, Pathos, and Logos

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Keywords

Aristotelian rhetoric; media discourse; persuasion strategies; ethos; pathos; logos; discourse analysis; media linguistics; communicative influence

Abstract

This study critically re-examines the enduring relevance of Aristotelian rhetorical principles—ethos, pathos, and logos—within the context of contemporary English-language media discourse. Moving beyond descriptive applications of classical rhetoric, the research adopts a qualitative discourse-analytical approach to investigate how persuasive strategies are linguistically constructed and operationalized in modern journalism. The empirical analysis is based on a purposive selection of three news articles addressing a common geopolitical theme (war), each exemplifying a dominant rhetorical appeal. The findings demonstrate that logos is primarily realized through systematic argumentation, the integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence, and the strategic use of verifiable data, thereby reinforcing epistemic credibility. Pathos operates through nuanced emotional framing, foregrounding human vulnerability, resilience, and ethical urgency, often without reliance on overtly emotive language. In contrast, ethos is constructed through discursive references to institutional authority, expert validation, and the symbolic capital of public figures, contributing to the legitimization of mediated narratives. Importantly, the study reveals that these rhetorical dimensions do not function in isolation; rather, they interact dynamically, producing hybrid persuasive effects that enhance the overall communicative impact. By integrating insights from classical rhetoric and contemporary linguistic theory, this research advances a more nuanced understanding of media persuasion and highlights the continued analytical value of Aristotle's rhetorical framework in digitally mediated environments. The study contributes to the fields of media linguistics and discourse analysis by offering a structured interpretative model for examining persuasive communication in modern journalism.

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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary information ecosystem, media discourse has evolved into a highly complex communicative domain where the boundaries between information, interpretation, and persuasion are increasingly blurred. Modern journalism no longer functions solely as a neutral transmitter of facts; rather, it operates as a strategic discursive practice that actively shapes public perception, constructs social realities, and influences collective attitudes. Within this context, understanding the mechanisms of persuasion embedded in media language has become a central concern across disciplines such as media linguistics, discourse analysis, and communication studies.

Among the most enduring theoretical frameworks for analyzing persuasive communication is Aristotle's rhetorical triad—ethos, pathos, and logos—formulated in the 4th century BCE. Despite its ancient origins, Aristotelian rhetoric continues to offer a robust analytical lens for examining how credibility, emotional engagement, and logical reasoning function in communicative processes. Ethos refers to the construction of speaker credibility and authority, pathos to the strategic elicitation of audience

emotions, and logos to the use of rational argumentation and evidence. These dimensions correspond to fundamental cognitive and psychological mechanisms that remain highly relevant in contemporary media environments.

Recent scholarship has increasingly emphasized the persistence of rhetorical strategies in modern communication, particularly in digitally mediated contexts characterized by information overload, algorithmic filtering, and heightened audience fragmentation. Media texts are now produced and consumed within a competitive attention economy, where the effectiveness of communication depends not only on informational content but also on persuasive design. As a result, rhetorical techniques are often embedded implicitly within linguistic structures, narrative framing, and discursive positioning, making their identification and analysis both more challenging and more necessary.

While a substantial body of research has examined rhetorical strategies in political discourse, advertising, and public relations, comparatively fewer studies have provided a systematic linguistic analysis of how ethos, pathos, and logos are operationalized in contemporary journalistic texts addressing the same thematic context. Existing studies frequently adopt a descriptive or theoretical perspective, with limited attention to the interaction between rhetorical modes and their linguistic realization in real media discourse. This gap highlights the need for a more integrative and empirically grounded approach that bridges classical rhetorical theory with modern discourse-analytical methodologies.

Against this background, the present study aims to investigate the linguistic manifestations of Aristotelian rhetorical strategies in modern English-language news discourse. Focusing on a purposive sample of three media texts covering a common geopolitical issue, the research seeks to identify how each rhetorical appeal is constructed through specific linguistic and discursive mechanisms, and to examine the extent to which these strategies function independently or interactively. By doing so, the study addresses two central research questions: (1) How are ethos, pathos, and logos linguistically realized in contemporary media discourse? and (2) To what extent do these rhetorical dimensions intersect to produce hybrid persuasive effects?

The significance of this study lies in its attempt to reconceptualize classical rhetorical theory within the framework of modern media linguistics. By providing a structured analytical model for examining persuasive strategies in journalism, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how language operates as a tool of influence in contemporary society. Furthermore, the findings offer practical implications for media practitioners, educators, and researchers seeking to critically engage with the persuasive dimensions of public communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of persuasion in discourse has long occupied a central position in rhetoric, linguistics, and communication studies, with its intellectual foundations rooted in classical antiquity. Aristotle's rhetorical framework—comprising ethos, pathos, and logos—remains one of the most influential models for understanding how language functions as a tool of influence. While originally developed in the context of public oratory, this triadic model has demonstrated remarkable adaptability across historical periods and communicative domains, including contemporary media discourse.

Ethos, as conceptualized by Aristotle, refers to the persuasive power derived from the credibility and authority of the speaker. In modern discourse studies, ethos has been reinterpreted as a socially constructed and discursively negotiated phenomenon rather than a fixed attribute. Scholars such as Norman Fairclough (1995, 2015) argue that credibility is constructed through linguistic choices, institutional affiliations, and ideological positioning embedded within discourse. Similarly, Teun A. van Dijk (1998, 2011) emphasizes that authority in media texts is often reproduced through references to elite sources, expert voices, and institutional frameworks, thereby reinforcing power relations and epistemic hierarchies.

Pathos, the emotional dimension of persuasion, has also been extensively re-evaluated in contemporary scholarship. Rather than being limited to overt emotional language, recent studies highlight the subtle and cumulative ways in which discourse evokes affective responses. Research in media linguistics suggests that emotional framing is often achieved through narrative structures, lexical selection, and thematic emphasis rather than explicit emotional appeals. George Lakoff (2004) demonstrates how framing mechanisms shape audience perception by activating underlying cognitive schemas, while Ruth Wodak (2016) underscores the role of discourse in constructing moral evaluations and collective identities through emotionally resonant narratives.

Logos, associated with logical reasoning and evidence-based argumentation, remains a cornerstone of persuasive communication, particularly in journalistic contexts that emphasize credibility and factual reporting. However, contemporary research indicates that logos is not merely a matter of presenting objective facts; rather, it involves the strategic selection, organization, and interpretation of information. Studies in critical discourse analysis reveal that the presentation of data is often shaped by ideological assumptions and framing strategies, influencing how audiences interpret "facts" within broader narratives. As such, logos operates not only at the level of argumentation but also within the discursive construction of knowledge and truth.

In the context of media discourse, the interaction between these three rhetorical dimensions has become increasingly complex. The rise of digital media and the intensification of global information flows have transformed journalism into a hybrid communicative space where informational and persuasive functions are deeply intertwined. Scholars have noted that contemporary media texts rarely rely on a single rhetorical strategy; instead, they integrate multiple persuasive modes to enhance communicative effectiveness. This hybridization reflects the demands of an attention-driven media environment, where credibility, emotional engagement, and logical coherence must be simultaneously negotiated.

Despite the extensive body of literature on rhetoric and discourse, a notable gap persists in the systematic analysis of how ethos, pathos, and logos are linguistically realized within comparable media texts addressing the same thematic context. Much of the existing research focuses either on theoretical elaboration or on single-case analyses, limiting the ability to identify patterns of interaction between rhetorical strategies. Moreover, there remains a need for studies that bridge classical rhetorical theory with contemporary discourse-analytical approaches, particularly in the analysis of news media.

Addressing this gap, the present study adopts an integrative perspective, combining insights from classical rhetoric, media linguistics, and discourse analysis to examine how persuasive strategies are constructed and operationalized in modern journalistic discourse. By focusing on multiple texts within a shared thematic domain, the study seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic interplay between ethos, pathos, and logos in contemporary media communication.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide important insights into the evolving nature of persuasion in contemporary media discourse, demonstrating that Aristotelian rhetorical principles remain highly relevant, albeit in transformed and context-dependent forms. While each analyzed text exhibits a dominant rhetorical orientation—logos, pathos, or ethos—the results indicate that persuasive effectiveness in modern journalism is largely contingent upon the interaction and hybridization of these strategies rather than their isolated application.

One of the most significant observations concerns the reconfiguration of logos in contemporary media texts. Rather than functioning as a purely objective presentation of facts, logos emerges as a strategically constructed form of epistemic authority. The use of quantitative data, expert testimony, and institutional references serves not only to inform but also to legitimize particular interpretations of reality. This finding aligns with critical discourse perspectives, which argue that “facts” in media discourse are often embedded within broader ideological and narrative frameworks. Consequently, logos should be understood not as neutral reasoning but as a discursive mechanism that shapes knowledge production and audience interpretation.

Similarly, the role of pathos in modern media discourse appears more nuanced than traditional rhetorical accounts might suggest. The analysis reveals that emotional engagement is frequently achieved through indirect and cumulative strategies rather than explicit emotional language. By foregrounding themes such as human vulnerability, resilience, and moral urgency, media texts construct affective environments that guide audience responses without overt manipulation. This subtlety enhances the persuasive power of pathos, as it operates beneath the level of conscious resistance, aligning emotional responses with broader narrative structures.

Ethos, in turn, is shown to be deeply intertwined with institutional and discursive contexts. The credibility of media texts is not solely dependent on the individual authority of speakers but is constructed through references to recognized institutions, expert communities, and formal procedures. This reflects a shift from personal to institutional ethos, where trust is mediated through systems of legitimacy rather than individual character alone. At the same time, the personalization of authority—through the inclusion of named public figures and leaders—continues to play a crucial role in reinforcing credibility and fostering audience alignment.

Importantly, the study highlights the interdependence of rhetorical strategies in contemporary media discourse. Even in texts where one mode is dominant, elements of the other two are consistently present, contributing to a layered and multidimensional persuasive effect. For example, logically structured arguments are often accompanied by subtle emotional framing, while appeals to authority are reinforced through both data and narrative context. This convergence suggests that effective media persuasion relies on the integration of cognitive, emotional, and ethical appeals, reflecting the complex nature of audience engagement in modern communication environments.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings support the continued relevance of Aristotelian rhetoric while also underscoring the need for its reinterpretation in light of contemporary media practices. The classical triad provides a valuable analytical framework, but its application must account for the dynamic, hybrid, and context-sensitive nature of modern discourse. By situating ethos, pathos, and logos within broader linguistic and discursive processes, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how persuasion operates in today’s media landscape.

From a practical standpoint, the results have implications for both media production and critical media literacy. For journalists and communicators, an awareness of rhetorical strategies can enhance the effectiveness and ethical responsibility of reporting. For audiences, understanding the mechanisms of persuasion can foster more critical engagement with media content, enabling individuals to navigate complex information environments with greater awareness.

Nevertheless, the study is not without limitations. The analysis is based on a relatively small sample of texts, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could expand the dataset, incorporate cross-cultural comparisons, or integrate quantitative methods to further explore patterns of rhetorical usage. Additionally, the growing influence of visual and multimodal elements in media discourse suggests the need for research that extends beyond linguistic analysis to include visual rhetoric and multimodal communication.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that persuasion in contemporary media is a multifaceted and dynamically constructed process in which ethos, pathos, and logos function as interrelated and context-dependent strategies. Their continued relevance

underscores the enduring value of rhetorical analysis, while their transformation reflects the evolving nature of communication in the digital age.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytical approach to examine the linguistic realization of Aristotelian rhetorical strategies—ethos, pathos, and logos—in contemporary media discourse. Qualitative discourse analysis is particularly suitable for this research, as it enables an in-depth exploration of how meaning, persuasion, and ideological positioning are constructed through language in naturally occurring texts (Fairclough, 2015; van Dijk, 2011).

The study is interpretative in nature and is grounded in the theoretical integration of classical rhetorical theory and contemporary discourse analysis, allowing for a multidimensional examination of persuasive mechanisms in journalistic communication.

Data Selection and Sampling Strategy

The empirical dataset consists of three English-language news articles addressing a shared geopolitical theme—war. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure analytical relevance and comparability across texts. The selected articles were drawn from internationally recognized media outlets, including *The Washington Post*, *Associated Press*, and *NPR*, which are widely regarded as credible sources of global news reporting.

The selection criteria were as follows:

- Topical consistency: All texts address the same general theme (war and geopolitical conflict) to ensure contextual comparability.
- Rhetorical diversity: Each article demonstrates a dominant orientation toward one rhetorical appeal (logos, pathos, or ethos), enabling a structured comparative analysis.
- Discursive richness: The texts contain sufficient linguistic and rhetorical features to support detailed qualitative analysis.
- Accessibility and authenticity: All materials are publicly available and represent authentic media discourse.

This sampling strategy aligns with qualitative research principles, which prioritize depth of analysis over statistical generalizability (Creswell, 2014).

Analytical Framework

The analysis is based on an integrated rhetorical-discursive framework, combining Aristotelian rhetorical theory with principles from critical discourse analysis (CDA). The framework operationalizes the three rhetorical appeals as follows:

- Logos (Cognitive Dimension): Identified through the presence of logical argumentation, statistical data, cause-effect reasoning, and evidential markers.
- Pathos (Affective Dimension): Identified through emotional framing, narrative strategies, metaphorical language, and thematic emphasis on human experience.
- Ethos (Credibility Dimension): Identified through references to authority, institutional legitimacy, expert opinion, and discursive markers of reliability.

These categories are not treated as mutually exclusive but as interrelated analytical dimensions, allowing for the identification of hybrid rhetorical patterns.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis was conducted in three stages:

1. Textual Coding: Each article was systematically examined to identify linguistic features corresponding to logos, pathos, and ethos. Relevant segments were coded based on predefined rhetorical indicators (e.g., statistical evidence, emotional framing, authority references).
2. Discursive Analysis: The coded elements were analyzed within their broader textual and contextual environment to determine how rhetorical strategies function in constructing meaning and persuasion. Particular attention was given to narrative structure, lexical choices, and intertextual references.
3. Comparative Interpretation: The findings from individual texts were compared to identify patterns of similarity and difference across rhetorical strategies. This stage enabled the identification of dominant persuasive modes and their interaction within contemporary media discourse.

Reliability and Validity

To enhance the analytical rigor of the study, the following measures were implemented:

- Theoretical triangulation: The integration of rhetorical theory and discourse analysis ensures a multidimensional interpretation of the data.
- Transparency of criteria: Clearly defined coding categories and selection criteria support replicability and methodological clarity.
- Contextual interpretation: The analysis considers the socio-political and communicative context of each text, reducing the risk of decontextualized interpretation.

While qualitative analysis does not aim for statistical generalization, these measures contribute to the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Limitations

The study is based on a relatively small sample of texts, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. However, the focus on in-depth qualitative analysis allows for a detailed examination of rhetorical mechanisms that may not be captured through large-scale quantitative approaches. Future research may expand the dataset, incorporate cross-cultural perspectives, or employ mixed-methods designs to further validate and extend the findings.

As is well known, the media serves both as a means of informing and persuading. It is intended for a mass yet heterogeneous audience, and its aim is to engage that audience as readers and viewers. Accordingly, its task is not only to provide information but also to exert a certain emotional influence and persuade the audience.

Theoretical Background: Persuasion and Aristotelian Rhetoric in Contemporary Media

Persuasion constitutes a fundamental mechanism of human communication and social interaction, permeating virtually all domains of public and private life, including politics, marketing, business, legal decision-making, and everyday interpersonal exchanges. As a discursive practice, persuasion is not merely concerned with the transmission of information but with the strategic shaping of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors through carefully constructed linguistic and rhetorical techniques. In this sense, persuasion operates as a subtle yet powerful form of influence, often functioning implicitly rather than through overt imposition. As noted by Romanova and Smirnova, persuasive techniques can be understood as a system of linguistic and communicative strategies designed to modify audience attitudes and achieve desired outcomes while maintaining the appearance of neutrality and objectivity.

Within the broader theoretical landscape of persuasive communication, the rhetorical framework developed by Aristotle remains one of the most enduring and analytically robust models. Formulated in the 4th century BCE, Aristotle's triadic conception of persuasion—logos, ethos, and pathos—continues to provide a foundational lens through which communicative processes can be examined across diverse temporal and cultural contexts. The enduring relevance of this framework lies in its grounding in fundamental aspects of human cognition and psychology, namely logical reasoning, emotional engagement, and the perception of credibility. These dimensions correspond to core mechanisms through which individuals interpret information, evaluate arguments, and form judgments, thereby ensuring the continued applicability of Aristotelian rhetoric in contemporary discourse.

In modern communication environments, particularly within the domain of journalism, the significance of rhetorical strategies has arguably intensified. Contemporary media operates within a highly competitive and saturated information landscape characterized by rapid dissemination, audience fragmentation, and the pervasive influence of digital technologies. In such a context, the role of media extends beyond the mere reporting of events; it encompasses the construction of meaning, the framing of reality, and the shaping of public opinion. Although visual and multimodal elements have become increasingly prominent in digital media, linguistic discourse remains the primary vehicle through which persuasive meanings are articulated and negotiated. Consequently, rhetorical analysis continues to occupy a central position in understanding how media texts influence audiences.

The present study is situated within this analytical framework and seeks to investigate the linguistic realization of Aristotelian rhetorical strategies in contemporary English-language news discourse. Specifically, it aims to identify how ethos, pathos, and logos are operationalized through distinct linguistic mechanisms and to assess their relative and combined effectiveness in shaping audience perception. By focusing on media texts addressing a common geopolitical theme, the study provides a comparative perspective on the deployment of persuasive strategies in modern journalism.

Aristotle's conception of rhetoric, as articulated in his seminal work *Rhetoric*, underscores its practical and epistemological significance. He argues that rhetoric serves as an essential tool for defending truth and justice, particularly in contexts where audiences may lack either the capacity or the inclination to engage in detailed analytical reasoning. In such cases, persuasion becomes a necessary means of simplifying complex issues and rendering them accessible to broader audiences. Moreover, Aristotle emphasizes that rhetorical competence is not merely an abstract skill but a practical necessity, comparable to physical defense, as individuals must be capable of articulating and defending their positions within social and political contexts.

The development of rhetorical studies in the modern era, particularly during the twentieth century, has further expanded the scope and application of Aristotelian principles. The emergence of Communicative Linguistics and discourse analysis has facilitated a more systematic examination of how rhetorical strategies are embedded within linguistic structures and communicative practices. This has led to the integration of rhetoric into various fields, including media studies, organizational communication, and marketing, where it is employed to analyze and enhance persuasive effectiveness.

Central to Aristotle's rhetorical theory is the concept of the rhetorical situation, which comprises several interrelated components that determine the effectiveness of communication. Among these, the nature of the issue under discussion and the characteristics of the audience play a particularly crucial role. Different issues necessitate different persuasive approaches, and the success of communication depends on the speaker's ability to define the issue clearly and to tailor the message to the audience's expectations, values, and cognitive frameworks. The audience, in turn, is not a passive recipient but an active participant in the communicative process, whose interpretation of the message is shaped by prior knowledge, beliefs, and social context.

In addition to the issue and the audience, the role of the speaker—or communicator—is central to the persuasive process. The speaker's credibility, expertise, and ethical positioning significantly influence the reception of the message. However, effective persuasion extends beyond personal attributes; it requires the strategic selection and integration of rhetorical appeals in accordance with the communicative context.

To this end, Aristotle identifies three primary modes of persuasion. *Logos* refers to the use of logical reasoning, structured argumentation, and empirical evidence to establish the validity of a claim. It encompasses not only the presentation of facts but also the organization and interpretation of information in a coherent and persuasive manner. *Ethos*, by contrast, pertains to the construction of credibility and trustworthiness, achieved through the projection of competence, integrity, and authority. *Pathos* involves the elicitation of emotional responses, enabling the speaker to connect with the audience on an affective level and to influence attitudes through feelings such as empathy, fear, or hope.

In contemporary media discourse, these rhetorical dimensions are not employed in isolation but are often intricately interwoven, reflecting the complexity of modern communication. Journalistic texts, in particular, frequently combine logical argumentation with emotional framing and appeals to authority, creating multifaceted persuasive effects that enhance their impact on audiences. Understanding the linguistic mechanisms through which these strategies are realized is therefore essential for a comprehensive analysis of media persuasion.

Aristotelian Rhetoric in Contemporary Media Discourse: A Linguistic Analysis of Ethos, Pathos, and Logos

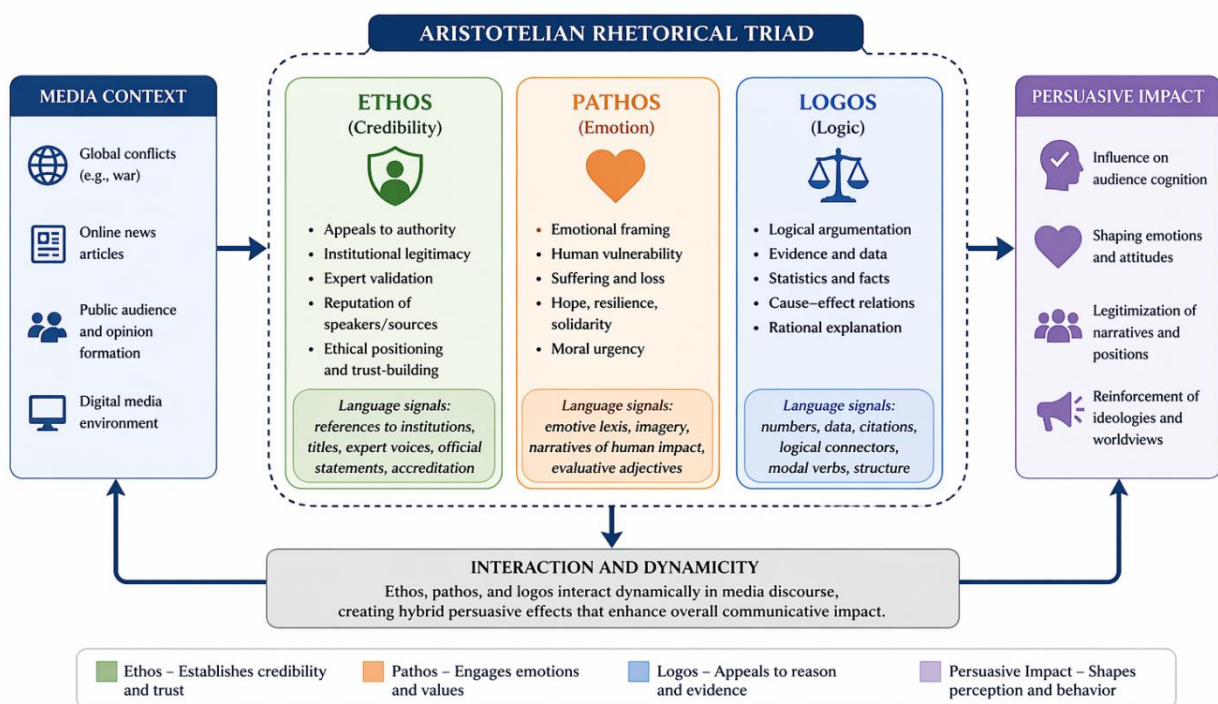


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Aristotelian Rhetorical Strategies in Contemporary Media Discourse

Source: Developed by the author based on Aristotelian rhetorical theory and contemporary discourse analysis.

Empirical Analysis of Rhetorical Strategies in Contemporary Media Discourse

To systematically investigate the linguistic realization of Aristotelian rhetorical appeals in contemporary journalism, this study adopts a purposive comparative design based on three English-language news articles addressing a shared geopolitical theme—war. Each selected text exhibits a dominant orientation toward one of the classical persuasive modes: *logos*, *pathos*, or *ethos*. Such a design enables a structured examination of how distinct rhetorical strategies are operationalized within comparable discursive contexts, while also allowing for the identification of overlapping and hybrid persuasive mechanisms. This approach aligns with contemporary discourse-analytical methodologies that emphasize the interplay between linguistic form, communicative intent, and socio-political context (Fairclough, 2015; van Dijk, 2011).

Logos-Oriented Discourse: Rationalization, Evidence, and Epistemic Authority

The rhetorical appeal to *logos* is predominantly realized through the systematic organization of argumentation, the integration of empirical data, and the deployment of linguistic structures that enhance logical coherence and cognitive accessibility. In line with classical rhetorical theory, *logos* functions as the primary mechanism through which claims are validated and knowledge is constructed (Aristotle, 2008). However, contemporary research suggests that *logos* extends beyond mere logical reasoning, encompassing the strategic framing and contextualization of information within discourse (Hyland, 2005; Richardson, 2007).

One of the most salient features of *logos*-oriented discourse is the use of tripartite syntactic structures, which organize information into parallel units and facilitate rhetorical clarity. Such structures not only enhance textual cohesion but also contribute to the perception of balance and completeness, thereby reinforcing argumentative persuasiveness (Mooney & Evans, 2019). In addition, the incorporation of quantitative data—such as statistics, numerical indicators, and measurable outcomes—serves as a key mechanism for establishing epistemic credibility. These elements function as what van Dijk (1998) describes as “evidential strategies,” which legitimize claims through the appearance of objectivity and factual accuracy.

Table 1. Integrated Analytical Framework of Aristotelian Rhetorical Strategies in Contemporary Media Discourse

Rhetorical Dimension	Theoretical Definition	Primary Linguistic Realizations	Discursive Mechanisms	Empirical Indicators in Media Texts	Dominant Communicative Function	Cognitive & Affective Impact on Audience	Illustrative Media Strategy (from Study)	Interaction with Other Rhetorical Modes
Logos	Logical appeal grounded in reason, evidence, and structured argumentation (Aristotle, 2008)	Quantitative data (statistics, figures), tripartite structures, causal connectors, technical vocabulary	Evidentiality, argument structuring, cause-effect reasoning, factual framing	Use of casualty figures, displacement statistics, spatial measurements, satellite data, institutional reports	Validation of claims through rational justification and empirical credibility	Enhances cognitive processing, promotes analytical reasoning, increases perceived objectivity	Data-driven reporting emphasizing verifiable outcomes and empirical consistency (e.g., ceasefire analysis)	Reinforced by <i>ethos</i> (authority of sources) and subtly complemented by <i>pathos</i> (human consequences embedded in data)
Pathos	Emotional appeal targeting audience feelings, values, and moral perceptions (Aristotle, 1984)	Evaluative lexis, metaphorical expressions, narrative framing, contrastive structures, human-centered descriptions	Emotional framing, moral positioning, narrative personalization, contrastive discourse	Descriptions of civilian suffering, resilience, war fatigue, symbolic phrases (e.g., “weaponizing winter”), references to prolonged conflict	Engagement through empathy, moral urgency, and affective resonance	Activates emotional response, shapes moral judgment, increases audience identification and engagement	Subtle emotional construction through neutral journalistic tone combined with human-centered storytelling	Interacts with <i>logos</i> (contextual grounding) and <i>ethos</i> (credibility of narrators) to produce balanced persuasion
Ethos	Credibility-based appeal	Proper names (leaders,	Authority construction,	Citations of political leaders,	Establishment of trust, legitimacy,	Enhances perceived credibility	Emphasis on statement	Strengthens <i>logos</i> (validation

	derived from authority, expertise, and trustworthiness (Aristotle, 2008)	experts), institutional references, attribution verbs, modal expressions, formal discourse markers	institutional legitimization, intertextual referencing, discursive positioning	references to international organizations (e.g., NATO, EU), diplomatic processes, official statements	and reliability of information	, reduces skepticism, fosters acceptance of information	s of world leaders, diplomatic negotiations, and institutional frameworks	of evidence) and supports pathos (emotional trust in authoritative figures)
Analytical Dimension		Generalized Findings Across All Texts						
Dominant Strategy Distribution		Each media text demonstrates a primary rhetorical orientation (logos, pathos, or ethos), yet none operates in isolation; all texts exhibit hybridization of rhetorical modes.						
Discursive Hybridization		Contemporary media discourse integrates multiple persuasive strategies simultaneously, reflecting the complexity of modern communication environments (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2016).						
Role of Language		Despite the rise of multimodal communication, linguistic structures remain the core mechanism for constructing persuasion, framing reality, and guiding interpretation.						
Epistemic Construction		“Facts” (logos) are not neutral but discursively constructed through selective presentation, institutional validation, and contextual framing (van Dijk, 2011).						
Affective Mediation		Emotional engagement (pathos) is increasingly indirect, relying on narrative and contextual cues rather than explicit emotional language.						
Credibility Formation		Trust (ethos) is produced through a dual mechanism: personalization (leaders, experts) and institutionalization (organizations, formal processes).						
Audience Impact		Persuasion operates at three interconnected levels: cognitive (logos), emotional (pathos), and social/epistemic trust (ethos).						
Overall Persuasive Effect		The most effective media discourse combines all three rhetorical dimensions, producing a multidimensional and synergistic persuasive outcome.						

The analyzed article from *The Washington Post* exemplifies this logos-driven discourse through its extensive use of statistical evidence, spatial measurements, and institutional references. By presenting detailed casualty figures, displacement data, and geographic distributions of control, the text constructs a data-driven narrative that substantiates its central claim regarding the ineffectiveness of the ceasefire. Importantly, these data are not presented in isolation but are embedded within a broader argumentative framework that establishes causal relationships between military actions and humanitarian outcomes.

Furthermore, the reliance on authoritative sources—including United Nations agencies, conflict databases such as ACLED, and expert analyses—reinforces the logical integrity of the discourse. As noted by Fairclough (1995), such intertextual references serve to reproduce institutional authority and legitimize particular representations of reality. The juxtaposition of official statements with independent data creates a discursive tension that enhances critical engagement while maintaining an overall orientation toward rational persuasion.

Notably, even narrative elements that might traditionally evoke emotional responses are reframed within a logic-based structure, supported by temporal sequencing, spatial verification, and institutional validation. This integration of narrative and evidence reflects the hybridization of rhetorical strategies in contemporary media, where logos remains dominant but is reinforced by complementary discursive elements.

Pathos-Oriented Discourse: Emotional Framing and Affective Engagement

In contrast, the second analyzed article, published by the Associated Press, demonstrates a predominant reliance on pathos as a persuasive strategy, albeit in a manner consistent with modern journalistic norms of neutrality and objectivity. Rather than employing overtly emotive language, the text constructs emotional engagement through subtle and cumulative discursive mechanisms, reflecting what Wodak (2016) describes as the “discursive construction of affect.” A central feature of pathos-oriented discourse is the establishment of shared experiential and moral frameworks, which enable the audience to identify with the subjects of the narrative. This process, often referred to as “common ground construction,” facilitates emotional alignment by invoking universal themes such as suffering, resilience, and hope (Lakoff, 2004). In the analyzed text, references to civilian hardship, prolonged conflict, and the human consequences of war serve to foreground the affective dimension of the discourse.

The emotional impact is further intensified through strategic contrast, particularly between the optimistic rhetoric of diplomatic negotiations and the persistent reality of violence. This juxtaposition creates a sense of cognitive and emotional dissonance, which enhances audience engagement and reinforces the perceived urgency of the situation. As Charteris-Black (2014) argues, such contrasts are a powerful rhetorical device that amplify emotional resonance while maintaining discursive coherence. Additionally,

the use of metaphorical language—such as the phrase “weaponizing winter”—illustrates how pathos can be conveyed through figurative expression, activating cognitive and emotional schemas that shape audience interpretation. This aligns with cognitive linguistic perspectives, which emphasize the role of metaphor in structuring thought and influencing perception (Lakoff, 2004).

The personalization of authority also contributes to the emotional dimension of the text. By foregrounding the experiences and statements of political leaders, particularly Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the discourse humanizes abstract geopolitical processes and facilitates emotional identification. This strategy reflects a broader trend in media discourse toward the personalization of politics, where individual actors serve as focal points for narrative engagement (Fetzer, 2021). Overall, pathos in contemporary media discourse operates through indirect and contextually embedded mechanisms, shaping audience perception by constructing affective environments rather than through explicit emotional appeals. This subtlety enhances its persuasive effectiveness, as it aligns emotional responses with broader narrative structures.

Ethos-Oriented Discourse: Credibility, Authority, and Institutional Trust

The third analyzed article, also from the Associated Press, is primarily oriented toward ethos, emphasizing the construction of credibility and authority as the central persuasive mechanism. In Aristotelian terms, ethos is derived from the perceived character and reliability of the speaker; however, in contemporary media discourse, it is more accurately understood as a discursive construct shaped by institutional and contextual factors (Hyland, 2005).

A key feature of ethos-oriented discourse is the prominence of authoritative figures and institutional actors. The repeated attribution of statements to globally recognized political leaders—such as Donald Trump, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and other international officials—serves to legitimize the narrative by associating it with established sources of power and expertise. As van Dijk (2011) notes, such references function as “elite discourse markers,” reinforcing hierarchical structures of knowledge and authority.

Institutional context further strengthens this effect. References to formal diplomatic processes, international organizations, and multilateral negotiations create a discursive environment characterized by procedural legitimacy and political credibility. This aligns with Fairclough’s (2015) observation that institutional discourse plays a central role in constructing trust and authority within public communication.

At the same time, the discourse emphasizes balance and neutrality, presenting multiple perspectives and acknowledging the complexity of geopolitical negotiations. This balanced representation enhances credibility by positioning the text as an objective and reliable source of information. The strategic use of hedging, modal verbs, and attribution further contributes to this effect, signaling caution and professionalism in the presentation of claims (Hyland, 2005).

Moreover, the personalization of authority complements institutional credibility by presenting leaders as rational and responsible actors. This dual construction of ethos—combining personal and institutional elements—reflects the multifaceted nature of credibility in contemporary media discourse.

Synthesis and Theoretical Implications

The comparative analysis of the three texts reveals that, while each article prioritizes a specific rhetorical appeal, persuasive effectiveness in contemporary media discourse is fundamentally dependent on the interaction and integration of ethos, pathos, and logos. This finding supports recent scholarship emphasizing the hybrid nature of modern communication, where multiple persuasive strategies are combined to address diverse audience expectations and cognitive processes (Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

From a theoretical perspective, these results underscore the continued relevance of Aristotelian rhetoric while also highlighting the need for its reinterpretation within contemporary communicative contexts. The classical triad provides a valuable analytical framework; however, its application must account for the dynamic, context-dependent, and multimodal nature of modern discourse.

Furthermore, the findings contribute to ongoing debates in media linguistics and discourse analysis regarding the construction of meaning, authority, and affect in public communication. By demonstrating how rhetorical strategies are embedded within linguistic structures and discursive practices, the study advances a more integrated understanding of persuasion as a complex and multidimensional process.

Ethos-Oriented Discourse: Authority, Legitimacy, and the Construction of Trust

Beyond explicit appeals to authority, ethos in contemporary media discourse is also constructed through more subtle discursive strategies, including the narration of personal experience and the strategic deployment of intertextual references. The inclusion of firsthand accounts, insider perspectives, and experiential narratives functions as a form of evidential support, reinforcing the perceived authenticity and credibility of the message. Such techniques align with broader discourse-analytical perspectives, which emphasize that credibility is not an inherent property of the speaker but a discursively negotiated effect achieved through linguistic and contextual cues (Hyland, 2005; Fairclough, 2015).

In the analyzed article, the prominence of globally recognized political actors—such as Donald Trump, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and Vladimir Putin—serves as a primary mechanism for constructing ethos. Their statements are not merely reported as informational content but are positioned as authoritative interpretations of geopolitical reality. By foregrounding these voices,

the discourse shifts the basis of persuasion from empirical validation or emotional engagement to the credibility of the speaker, thereby exemplifying what van Dijk (2011) describes as the privileging of elite discourse in media representation.

This construction of authority is further reinforced through the embedding of discourse within institutional and procedural contexts. References to high-level diplomatic engagements, such as bilateral negotiations, multilateral summits, and strategic consultations with international actors, contribute to the production of what may be termed *institutional ethos*. The invocation of recognized entities—such as European Commission, NATO, and the White House—functions as a discursive marker of legitimacy, signaling that the information presented is grounded in formal governance structures and internationally recognized frameworks.

Moreover, the discourse employs linguistic strategies associated with balance, caution, and deliberation, which further enhance credibility. The use of hedging expressions, modal verbs, and attributional phrases (e.g., “acknowledged,” “suggested,” “indicated”) constructs a tone of measured realism, positioning the narrative as analytically grounded rather than ideologically driven. This aligns with Hyland’s (2005) concept of metadiscourse, wherein linguistic features guide the reader’s interpretation and reinforce the writer’s stance as credible and responsible.

An additional dimension of ethos construction is the portrayal of political leaders as rational and pragmatic actors operating within complex decision-making environments. The depiction of negotiations as structured, procedural, and iterative processes contributes to the framing of international relations as governed by institutional norms rather than arbitrary power dynamics. This representation not only enhances the perceived reliability of the information but also fosters trust in the broader system of diplomatic engagement.

Importantly, the interplay between personal authority and institutional legitimacy reflects a dual-layered model of ethos in contemporary media discourse. On the one hand, individual leaders embody authority through their positions and public personas; on the other, institutions provide a structural framework that validates and stabilizes this authority. This dual construction underscores the complexity of credibility in modern communication, where trust is mediated through both human agents and organizational systems.

Extended Synthesis and Discussion

Taken together, the analyses of logos-, pathos-, and ethos-oriented texts reveal that persuasive communication in contemporary media is inherently multidimensional and dynamically constructed. While each rhetorical mode may dominate in specific contexts, their interaction produces a layered and synergistic effect that enhances overall communicative impact. This finding corroborates the argument advanced by Wodak and Meyer (2016) that discourse should be understood as a site of interaction between cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of meaning-making.

In particular, the results suggest that the effectiveness of persuasion is contingent not only on the presence of individual rhetorical strategies but also on their contextual alignment with audience expectations and communicative goals. Logos-driven discourse is most effective in contexts requiring factual validation and analytical reasoning; pathos-oriented discourse excels in generating empathy and moral engagement; and ethos-based discourse is particularly influential in establishing trust and legitimacy. However, in practice, these strategies are rarely isolated, as media texts continuously negotiate between informing, engaging, and legitimizing their content.

From a broader theoretical perspective, the findings reinforce the continued relevance of Aristotle’s rhetorical framework while also highlighting its transformation in the context of contemporary media ecosystems. The classical triad of ethos, pathos, and logos remains a powerful analytical tool, yet its modern manifestations are shaped by factors such as digitalization, globalization, and the increasing complexity of information flows. As a result, rhetorical strategies are now embedded within hybrid discursive forms that integrate textual, contextual, and institutional dimensions.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that modern media discourse operates as a sophisticated system of persuasion in which language functions not merely as a vehicle for information transmission but as a strategic instrument for shaping perception and influencing public opinion. The analysis confirms that Aristotelian rhetorical principles continue to underpin contemporary communicative practices, albeit in evolved and context-dependent forms.

The examined texts illustrate that while different media narratives may prioritize distinct rhetorical strategies, their ultimate objective remains consistent: to guide audience interpretation and construct particular versions of reality. The persistence of ethos, pathos, and logos as foundational elements of persuasion underscores their deep-rooted connection to human cognition and social interaction.

Despite the growing prominence of visual and multimodal communication in the digital age, linguistic discourse retains its central role in structuring meaning and mediating influence. The ability of language to integrate logical reasoning, emotional resonance, and credibility construction ensures its continued dominance as a persuasive tool. Consequently, a nuanced understanding of rhetorical strategies is essential not only for scholars and media practitioners but also for audiences navigating increasingly complex information environments.

Future research may build on these findings by expanding the scope of analysis to include multimodal elements, cross-cultural comparisons, and quantitative approaches to rhetorical patterning. Such developments would further enhance our understanding

of how persuasion operates in an evolving media landscape, reinforcing the enduring significance of rhetorical analysis in contemporary communication studies.

Findings

The analysis of the selected media texts reveals that Aristotelian rhetorical strategies—logos, pathos, and ethos—remain central to the construction of persuasive discourse in contemporary journalism, albeit in transformed and context-dependent forms. While each article demonstrates a dominant rhetorical orientation, the findings indicate that persuasive effectiveness is not derived from the isolated use of a single strategy but from the dynamic interaction among multiple rhetorical dimensions.

Logos as Epistemic Structuring Mechanism

The findings show that logos functions as the primary mechanism for constructing epistemic authority in media discourse. This is achieved through the systematic integration of quantitative data, empirical evidence, and structured argumentation. The use of statistical information, spatial measurements, and institutional reports enhances the perceived objectivity of the text, aligning with the expectations of journalistic credibility.

However, the analysis also demonstrates that logos is not purely neutral. The selection, organization, and contextual framing of data contribute to the construction of specific narratives, thereby influencing audience interpretation. This suggests that logos operates not only as a tool of rational persuasion but also as a discursive strategy for shaping knowledge and guiding interpretation.

Pathos as Affective Framing Strategy

Pathos emerges as a subtle yet powerful mechanism for emotional engagement. Rather than relying on overtly emotive language, contemporary media discourse employs indirect strategies such as narrative framing, contrast, and thematic emphasis to evoke affective responses. The foregrounding of human vulnerability, resilience, and moral urgency enables the audience to engage with the discourse on an emotional level.

The findings further indicate that pathos is often embedded within ostensibly neutral reporting, reflecting the norms of modern journalism. Emotional resonance is achieved through cumulative discursive effects rather than explicit emotional appeals, enhancing persuasive effectiveness while maintaining the appearance of objectivity.

Ethos as Discursive Construction of Credibility

Ethos is primarily constructed through the representation of authority, expertise, and institutional legitimacy. The frequent citation of political leaders, experts, and international organizations reinforces the credibility of the discourse by associating it with recognized sources of power and knowledge. Importantly, the findings highlight a dual-layered structure of ethos: personal credibility, derived from the authority of individual actors, and institutional credibility, grounded in formal structures and processes. This dual construction reflects the complexity of trust formation in contemporary media environments.

Hybridization of Rhetorical Strategies

A key finding of this study is the hybrid nature of rhetorical strategies in modern media discourse. Even in texts where one rhetorical mode is dominant, elements of the other two are consistently present. This interaction produces a multidimensional persuasive effect, combining logical reasoning, emotional engagement, and credibility construction.

Such hybridization reflects the demands of contemporary communication, where audiences expect information to be simultaneously credible, engaging, and meaningful. The integration of rhetorical strategies enhances the overall effectiveness of discourse, enabling media texts to address diverse cognitive and affective dimensions of audience perception.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the findings, this study proposes an integrated conceptual framework for understanding the role of Aristotelian rhetorical strategies in contemporary media discourse.

Framework Overview

The framework conceptualizes persuasion as a multidimensional process consisting of three interrelated components:

- **Logos (Cognitive Dimension):** Represents logical reasoning and the construction of knowledge through evidence, argumentation, and structured discourse.
- **Pathos (Affective Dimension):** Represents emotional engagement achieved through narrative framing, thematic emphasis, and implicit affective cues.
- **Ethos (Credibility Dimension):** Represents the construction of trust through authority, expertise, and institutional legitimacy.

Dynamic Interaction Model

Rather than functioning independently, these components operate within a dynamic interaction system, where:

- Logos is reinforced by ethos (credibility of sources)

- Pathos is grounded by logos (contextual rationality)
- Ethos is strengthened by both logos (evidence) and pathos (emotional trust)

This interaction creates a synergistic persuasive effect, in which the overall impact of discourse exceeds the sum of its individual components.

Contextual Moderators

The framework also incorporates contextual factors that influence the realization of rhetorical strategies:

- Media environment (digital vs. traditional)
- Audience characteristics (knowledge, values, expectations)
- Sociopolitical context (conflict, crisis, stability)

These factors shape how rhetorical strategies are selected, combined, and interpreted within specific communicative settings.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that Aristotelian rhetorical principles—ethos, pathos, and logos—continue to play a fundamental role in shaping contemporary media discourse. Despite the transformation of communication environments in the digital age, these classical strategies remain deeply embedded in the linguistic and discursive structures of modern journalism.

The analysis reveals that persuasion in media discourse is not a unidimensional process but a complex and dynamic interaction of cognitive, emotional, and credibility-based mechanisms. Logos contributes to the construction of knowledge and rational understanding, pathos facilitates emotional engagement and moral interpretation, and ethos establishes trust and legitimacy. Together, these dimensions form a comprehensive system of persuasion that influences how audiences perceive, interpret, and respond to information.

Importantly, the study highlights the hybrid nature of rhetorical strategies in contemporary communication. Media texts do not rely on a single mode of persuasion; rather, they integrate multiple strategies to achieve greater communicative effectiveness. This multidimensional approach reflects the complexity of modern audiences and the demands of an increasingly competitive information landscape.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings reaffirm the enduring relevance of Aristotelian rhetoric while also emphasizing the need for its reinterpretation in light of contemporary media practices. The proposed framework contributes to the fields of media linguistics and discourse analysis by offering a structured model for examining persuasive communication in modern journalism.

From a practical standpoint, the study underscores the importance of rhetorical awareness for both media producers and audiences. For journalists, an understanding of rhetorical strategies can enhance the clarity, effectiveness, and ethical responsibility of reporting. For audiences, recognizing these strategies can promote critical media literacy and more informed engagement with public discourse.

Future research may extend this study by incorporating larger datasets, cross-cultural comparisons, and multimodal analysis, particularly in relation to visual and digital communication. Such approaches would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how persuasion operates in an evolving media environment.

In conclusion, while the forms and contexts of communication continue to evolve, the fundamental principles of persuasion identified by Aristotle remain central to the dynamics of modern media discourse, confirming the timeless relevance of rhetorical analysis in understanding contemporary communication.

DECLARATIONS

Ethical Approval

This study does not involve human participants, animals, or any form of sensitive personal data. The research is based exclusively on publicly available media texts and complies with standard ethical guidelines for discourse analysis and humanities research.

Informed Consent

Not applicable. The study does not involve human subjects or primary data collection requiring informed consent.

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The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Data Availability Statement

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Author Contributions

Zinaida Chachanidze: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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